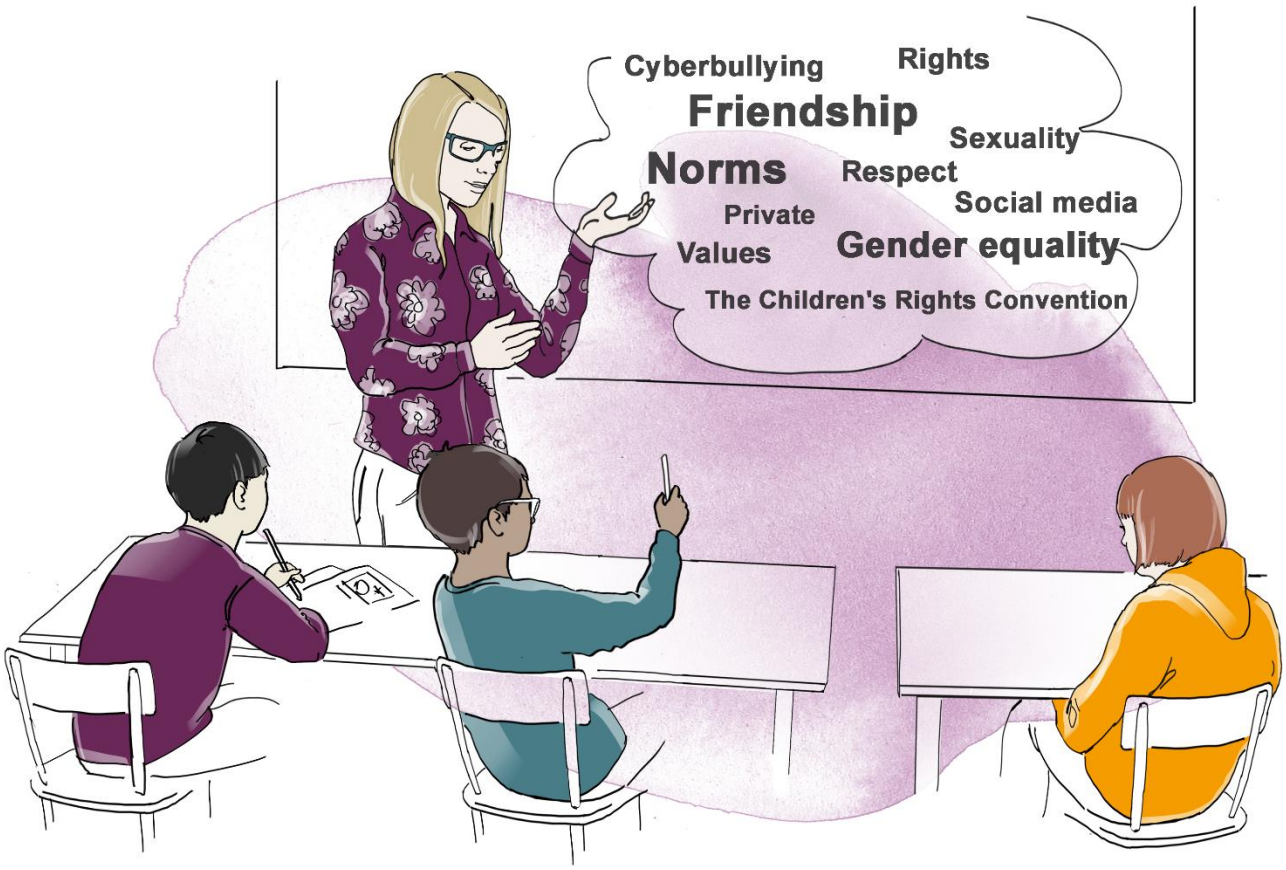
Sexuality, consent and relationships in the Swedish Curricula



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The National Agency for Education

The National Agency for Education is the central administrative authority for the public school system, publicly-organised preschooling, school-age educare and adult education. The Swedish Parliament and the Government set out the goals and guidelines for preschool and school through, e.g., the Education Act and the curricula.

The National Agency for Education is tasked with ensuring that all children and pupils have access to the same high-quality standard of education and activities in secure environments. The Agency's mission is to create the best conditions for the children's development and learning, and to help improve the pupils' learning outcomes. Municipalities and independent schools are the principal organisers in the school system, allocating resources and organising activities so that pupils attain the national goals.

The Agency prepares knowledge requirements, regulations, general recommendations and national tests. Moreover, the Agency is responsible for official statistics related to education, conducts national follow-ups and evaluations, and oversees Sweden's participation in international education surveys.

Development and in-service training

The National Agency for Education ensures that Swedish education maintains a good standard of quality. The Agency achieves this with the help of national school development programmes and in-service training for school staff. The Agency also allocates grant funding and organises head teacher training programmes.

1. Sexuality education in Sweden

There is a long history of sexuality education in Sweden, with the role of teaching becoming increasingly pronounced in the first half of the twentieth century. Compulsory sexuality education was introduced in Swedish schools in 1955. The motivation behind this teaching has varied with each passing decade. Any time a problem linked to sexuality has emerged, voices have been raised about the quality of sexuality education. This teaching is expected to promote gender equality and the equal dignity of all, while preventing social problems; everything from HIV/AIDS, chlamydia and rising abortion rates to the use of sexual language, sexual exploitation, honour-based abuse and oppression. Despite having been compulsory for many years, the quality of sexuality education has varied over the years, with great differences both between and within schools.

Sexuality education can address several different perspectives that together provide the pupils with a broad picture of what human sexuality and relationships may involve. This covers human reproduction; issues related to relationships, love, responsibility, consent and reciprocity; as well as sexually transmitted diseases and contraception. It can also involve anything from a historic perspective on human sexuality and relationships, how different religions approach these issues, what we can learn from literary descriptions, and how norms relating to gender and sexuality are manifested in advertising to what legislation governing relationships exists in Sweden today.

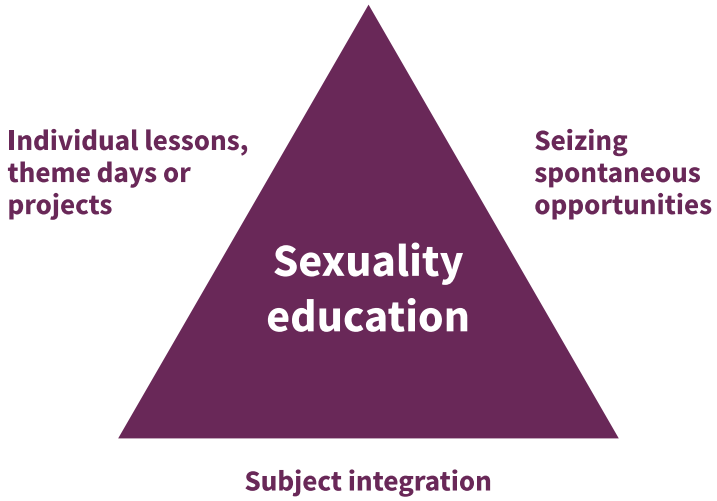
Since 2011, terms such as sexuality, relationships, gender, gender equality and norms have been included in several of the course and subject syllabuses for compulsory and upper secondary school and adult education. This means that the responsibility for this subject falls on several teachers and will be incorporated into multiple courses and subjects.

In 2022, the Swedish curricula was amended to include new texts regarding gender equality and comprehensive sexuality education. This area was then renamed sexuality, consent and relationships.

Teaching about sexuality, consent, and relationships in Swedish schools is informed by a norm-conscious approach. This means ensuring that the teaching content is equally pertinent to all pupils, irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The language, examples, and viewpoints presented in the classroom should emphasise universality and inclusivity rather than presupposing any specific identity or orientation.

2. The three aspects of sexuality education

Sexuality education in schools can be said to consist of three parts. It is important to consider each one of these parts when planning, monitoring and developing sexuality education, as they all contribute to providing a complete picture of this subject.



1. Subject integration

The majority of the work will take place in subject teaching, through the teacher-led discussions and elements in the classroom. The aim is to give the pupils perspective and knowledge, enable them to see context and realise how the view of gender equality, sexuality, consent and relationships has an impact on entire societies and people's life chances, while making them aware of the norms and values that affect individuals and groups in society.

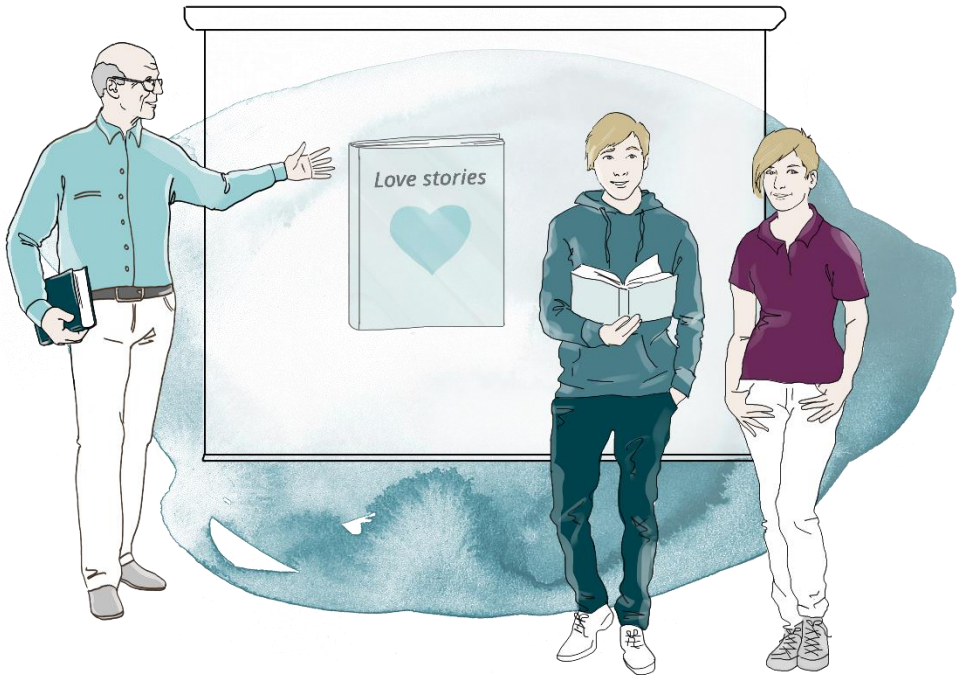
2. Everyday efforts – seizing spontaneous opportunities

The second part involves everyday school work, i.e., seizing opportunities to bring up the subject that present themselves naturally through the pupils' questions and interactions inside and outside the classroom. A lot happens over the course of a school day. This may involve positive and constructive contributions, with pupils who are eager to discuss and talk about moral and existential issues relating to gender, sexuality or relationships, often in connection to current issues in the media or their everyday lives. Unfortunately, there is also a flip side to what happens in everyday life – for example insults, threats and rumour mongering. Dealing with this is also a part of the work. Preschools and schools are obliged to act fast when a member of staff finds out that a child or a pupil feels subjected to any form of harassment, such as sexual harassment or degrading treatment. The organisation must investigate what has happened and take measures to prevent any further violations.

3. Individual lessons, themed days or projects

The third side of this triangle may involve individual lessons, themed days, or projects where pupils can discuss different questions relating to sexuality education. This could involve organising a themed day about sexual and reproductive health, human rights, or gender equality to clearly highlight these issues. Schools can also draw attention to World AIDS Day or movements such as #Metoo, or have a special themed day on sexuality and relationships where the pupils can discuss issues within the knowledge area through various activities.

In such teaching, teachers can collaborate with school health services staff in planning and implementation. The youth centre in the area could also be involved at times in certain elements.



3. What does the curriculum say?

5 § Education should be designed in accordance with fundamental democratic values and human rights such as:

- the inviolability of human life
- the individual's freedom and integrity
- the equal value of all people
- gender equality
- solidarity between people

The Swedish Education Act, Section 5

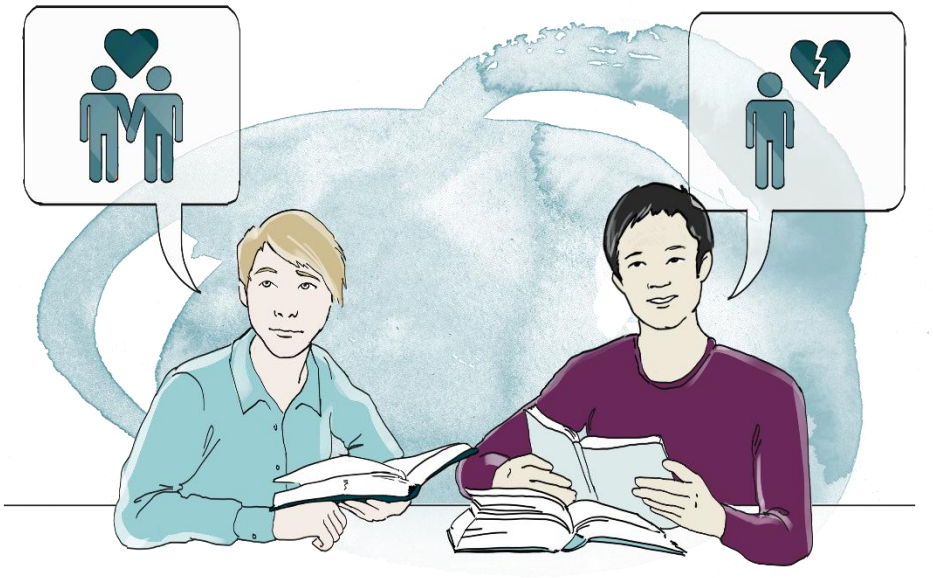
According to the **Curriculum for the Preschool**, all preschools shall provide each child with the conditions to develop respect for and understanding of the equal value of all people and human rights. Preschools shall combat traditional gender patterns and gender roles, and consciously promote the equal rights and opportunities of all children, regardless of gender. All children in preschool shall have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests without having limitations imposed by stereotyped gender roles. The preschool shall also respect the children's rights to physical integrity and personal privacy, for example, in documentation. In preschool, children shall be provided with the conditions to develop their identity and feel security in it, as well as awareness of their right to their physical integrity and personal privacy.

The preschool's head is responsible for the quality of the preschool and, within given constraints, has a specific responsibility to include work on gender equality in systematic quality management efforts. They also need to ensure that the preschool's active measures to combat discrimination and abusive treatment are carried out and documented continuously. The head of the preschool is also responsible for ensuring that the staff are regularly provided the professional development required to be able to carry out their tasks in a professional manner. The preschool teacher and the work team shall also work actively and consciously towards gender equality.

According to the **Curriculum for Compulsory School, Preschool Class and School-Age Educare**, the **Curriculum for the Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities**, the **Curriculum for the Sami School,** the **Curriculum for the Compulsory Special Needs Schools**, the **Curriculum for the Upper Secondary School** and the **Curriculum for the Upper Secondary School Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities**, schools have a responsibility to ensure that pupils repeatedly discuss issues relating to sexuality, consent and relationships during their schooling. Education

shall thus promote the health and well-being of all pupils and empower them to make informed and independent choices. Schools shall help pupils to develop an understanding of both their own rights and the rights of others, and convey the importance of sexuality and relationships being consensual. Education shall critically examine power structures linked to gender and honour-based abuse and oppression. Pupils shall also be given the opportunity to develop a critical approach to how relationships and sexuality are portrayed in various media and contexts, including pornography.

Schools are responsible for ensuring that every pupil has acquired knowledge in the areas of sexuality, consent and relationships, and honour-based abuse and oppression. The headteacher has a special responsibility to ensure that the knowledge areas of sexuality, consent and relationships, and honour-based abuse and oppression are regularly addressed throughout the pupil's education.



Everyone working in the school shall show respect for each individual pupil and apply a democratic and norm-conscious approach in their daily work. Schools shall also promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise. Education shall be characterised by openness and respect for people's differences. At school, no one shall be subjected to discrimination related to sex, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, transgender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age or disability, or any other form of victimisation. Schools must work actively to combat all such tendencies. Intolerance, oppression and violence, such as racism, sexism and honour-based abuse and oppression must be prevented and addressed through knowledge and active measures.

Schools must actively and consciously promote the equal rights and opportunities of pupils, regardless of gender affiliation. Schools are also responsible for calling attention to and combating gender patterns that limit pupils' learning, choices and development.

The **curricula for the compulsory school system** assert that how the school organises education, how pupils are treated, and what demands and expectations are placed on them are all contributing factors that shape their perceptions of what is feminine and what is masculine. Schools shall therefore organise education in a way that enables pupils to meet, interact and work together and test and develop their abilities and interests with equal opportunities and on equal terms regardless of gender affiliation. The **curricula for the non-compulsory school system** specifies that pupils must be encouraged to develop their abilities and interests without being limited by notions of what is feminine and masculine. The school must also work to ensure that pupils interact and work together regardless of gender. Regardless of whether the education takes place at a workplace or at school, it must be characterised by a gender equality perspective.

Schools shall actively promote gender equality. Accordingly, schools shall model and communicate equal rights, opportunities and obligations for girls and boys, women and men. In accordance with the fundamental values, the **curricula for the compulsory school system** shall also promote interaction between pupils regardless of gender affiliation. Pupils shall, through education, gain an understanding of how different notions of what is feminine and masculine influence people’s opportunities. Schools must thereby help pupils to develop their ability to critically examine gender patterns and how they can limit people’s life choices and living conditions. The curricula for the non-compulsory school system have corresponding texts. According to the curricula for the compulsory school system, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that pupils are aware of how to seek help if they feel unsafe within or outside of the school environment.

To the extent relevant to the programme in question, adult education shall provide opportunities for students to discuss issues related to sexuality, consent, relationships and health. It shall help learners to develop an understanding of their own and others' rights and responsibilities and convey the importance of consensual and respectful sexuality and relationships. Adult education shall critically examine power structures linked to gender and honour-based abuse and oppression.

Fundamental values, democracy and citizenship education

The Swedish Education Act stipulates that education is to be designed in accordance with fundamental democratic values and human rights, such as the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal dignity of all people, equality and solidarity with and between people. Preschools must keep these values alive in their work with children, and function as both an interpreter and a means by which to convey them. Each and every person working in the school should also encourage respect for the intrinsic dignity of each person and the environment we all share.

Education must foster in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. The role of the school is to enable each individual pupil to discover what makes them unique, which enables them to take part in society by giving their best in responsible freedom.

Three perspectives: about, through and for

Children and pupils learn about equality, democracy and human rights when they work with the fundamental values. The fundamental values are also instilled through democratic working methods, equal treatment and efforts to actively combat violations against them. By taking part in this work, children and pupils develop the abilities they need to actively participate in a democratic society.

This involves knowledge and the ability to act, i.e., learning for democracy and human rights. Accordingly, the work to instil fundamental values involves both using factual knowledge and ensuring that these values permeate the schoolwork itself. The three perspectives facilitate a holistic view, which contributes to integrating fundamental values into knowledge objectives.

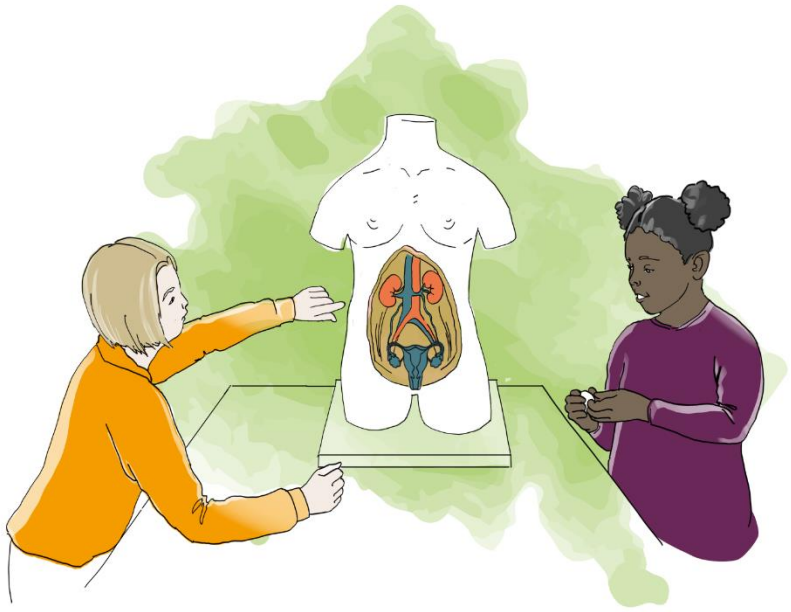
4. Subject integration in course and subject syllabuses

There are various concepts included in the curriculum, course and subject syllabuses that have some connection to the field of sexuality, consent and relationships. *Gender and gender roles* are terms that recur in several places. Terms such as *norms*, *values* and *ethics* are also used, as are *gender equality and sexuality*, *consent and relationships*.

The governance documents indicate that some subjects have a greater responsibility in the effort to impart knowledge about gender equality, sexuality, consent and relationships, as the corresponding course and subject syllabuses contain several aspects of sexuality education. At the same time, sexuality, consent and relationships, in a broader sense, is one aspect of the work to instil fundamental values; therefore, all teachers can be involved, regardless of subject.

Below are a few examples of the wording used with reference to gender equality, sexuality, consent and relationships from the course and subject syllabuses. This mainly involves the core content that explicitly deals with the above mentioned and other associated terms.

Biology and **Natural Sciences** are the subjects that deal with knowledge of the human body, reproduction, sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases. However, terms such as relationships, identity, responsibility, love and consent indicate the cross-disciplinary perspective approach of the area.



Biology, school years 4–6
Human puberty, reproduction, sexuality and identity, and issues related to relationships, love and responsibility.

Natural Sciences, school years 4–6, Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities
Human puberty, reproduction, sexuality and identity, and issues related to relationships, love and responsibility.

Biology, school years 7–9
Human reproduction, sexuality and identity, and issues related to relationships, love, responsibility, consent and reciprocity. Sexually transmitted diseases and contraception.

Searches, critical evaluation and use of information related to biology. Argumentation and position-taking on current environmental and health issues.

Science Studies, upper secondary school
Scientific aspects of, reflections on and discussions concerning norms, human sexuality, lust, relationships and sexual health.

Biology, upper secondary school
Links between living conditions, health and disease. Medical ethics.

What happens in the body during menstruation, infatuation, sex and pregnancy. How sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies can be prevented.

The teaching in **Civics** should address issues such as human rights, discrimination, population, political ideologies and current social affairs. All these areas can be linked to gender patterns, sexuality and relationships. Living conditions and gender equality are recurring subjects in both aim and core content.

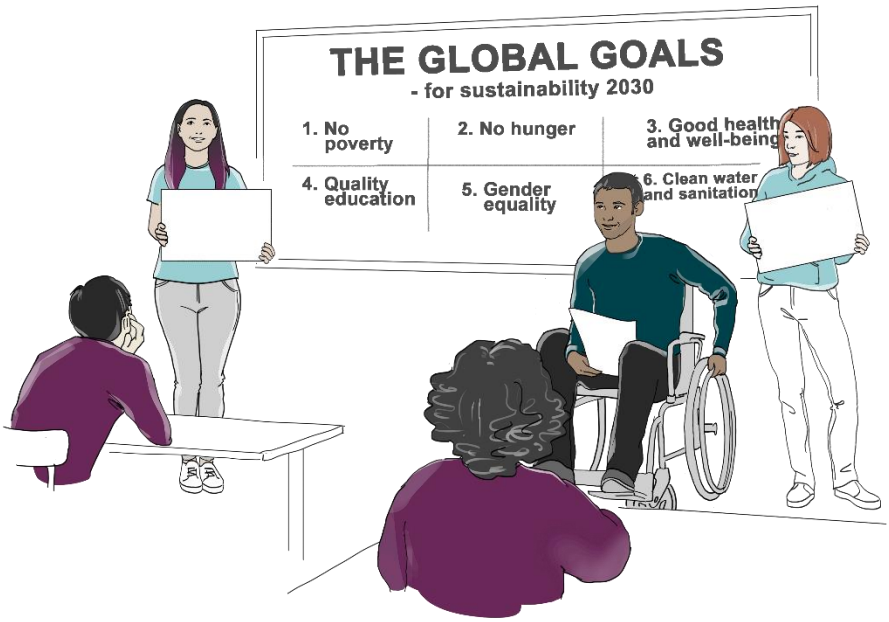
The core content contains several formulations that concretise the work with gender equality, sexuality, consent and relationships:

Social Studies, school years 1–3
Discussion and reflection on moral issues and questions of life relevant to the pupil, such as friendship, gender roles and death.

Civics, school years 4–6
Social roles and norms in different contexts, such as within the family and in friendships. Gender roles, gender equality and sexuality.

Civics, school years 7–9
People's identities, financial resources and opportunities in society and how these can be affected by factors such as socioeconomic background, sex, age and ethnicity. The concepts of power, justice, social equality and gender equality.

Violations of human rights in different parts of the world, and international efforts to promote human rights.



The principles of newsworthiness and how they can affect people's images of the world around them. How individuals and groups are portrayed in the media, for example based on gender and ethnicity, and how this can affect norm formation and values.

Social Studies, school years 7–9, Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities
Moral issues and questions of life based on pupils' thoughts and based on interpretations within religions and other worldviews. Examples of such issues include justice, solidarity, identity, love and sexuality.

How individuals and groups are portrayed in the media, for example based on gender and ethnicity, and how this can affect norm formation and values.

In **History**, pupils should have the opportunity to learn more about how women and men throughout the ages have created and changed societies and cultures, and how views on gender, sexuality and relationships have changed over time.

History, school years 4-6
Similarities and differences in the living conditions of children, women and men during the time period.

History, school years 7–9
Democratisation in Sweden and the emergence of the welfare society. The formation of political parties, new popular movements, such as the women's movement, and the fight for universal suffrage for women and men. Continuity and change in views on gender, gender equality and sexuality.

History, upper secondary school
Historical source material that reflects the role of people in political conflicts, cultural changes or attempts by women and men to change their own situation or

that of others. Different perspectives based on, for example, social background, ethnicity, generation, gender and sexuality.

The teaching should use historical sources to address similarities and differences in the living conditions of women and men and give an impression of how values reflect the time and context in which they emerge.1

Religion should address humanity, human rights, ethics and morals. The central ideas in different religions, the varied interpretations that exist within different religions, their branches and how they are practised are other areas that can address ideas concerning gender equality, gender, sexuality and relationships.

Religion, school years 4–6
Discussion and reflection on everyday moral issues based on pupils' own arguments and different religious interpretations. Examples of such issues include responsibility, exclusion, victimisation, gender equality and sexuality.

Religion, school years 7–9
Conflicts and consensus between different religious and secular approaches, for example on issues of freedom of religion, sexuality and the perception of the roles of women and men.

Discussion and reflection on questions of life based on pupils' own thoughts and on interpretations within religions and other worldviews. Examples of such issues include identity, love, sexuality and the meaning of life.

Religion, upper secondary school
Religion in relation to gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity and sexuality. Individual and group identities and how these can be shaped in relation to religion and world-view, based on, for example, written sources, traditions and historical and contemporary events.[2]

The teaching in **Home and Consumer Studies** shall help pupils to develop knowledge about norms, gender equality and the division of labour in the home, as well as opportunities to reflect on these.

Home and Consumer Studies, school years 7–9
Division of labour in the home from a gender equality perspective.

[1] New subject syllabuses for Natural Sciences and Biology go into effect from 2025.
[2] New subject syllabuses for Natural Sciences and Biology go into effect from 2025.

The contribution of **Art** is to provide an additional perspective on messages in mass media, and the analysis of images should address depictions of identity, sexuality and power.

Art, school years 7–9
Art that deals with identity and power relations, such as sexuality, ethnicity and gender. How these perspectives are shaped and constructed.

Rights, obligations and ethical issues when using and disseminating artwork. Possible conflicts between freedom of expression and privacy in the use and dissemination of artwork.

Physical Education and Health is a subject in which gender and gender patterns are always topical. How does gender influence expectations regarding abilities, interests and by extension also health? The teaching should address everything from health issues to physical ideals and gender aspects in the choice physical activities.

Physical education and health, school years 4–6
Norms related to different types of activities. How norms affect individuals' participation, such as gender and functionality norms related to different physical activities.

In the subject **Music**, it is described that music exists in all cultures and affects people physically, mentally and emotionally. As a form of aesthetic expression, music is used in a variety of contexts, has different functions and means different things to each of us. It is also an important part of people's social community and plays a role in the development of an individual's identity.

Music, school years 7–9
The impact and importance of music for people and society. The role of music in expressing identity, norms and group affiliation in different cultures and social contexts.

Swedish and **Swedish as a Second Language** may include the area primarily when teaching literature, the themes of which often include love, sexuality and relationships. This may also involve expectations on language use in terms of gender or how language can be charged. Ideas concerning gender patterns, sexuality, consent and relationships can be the focus of, for example, reading comprehension, composition, discussions and conversations. One aim in both these subjects is:

When encountering different types of texts, performing arts and other aesthetic storytelling, pupils shall be given the prerequisites to develop their language skills, their own identity and their understanding of the world around them.

This is also stipulated in the core content of Swedish. Corresponding texts also appear in **Swedish as a Second Language**:

Swedish, school years 4–6
Fiction for children and adolescents from different times, from Sweden, the Nordic region and other parts of the world. Lyrical poetry, drama, fairy tales and myths. Texts that highlight the human condition and issues of identity and life.

Swedish, school years 7–9
Different forms of dialogue. Active participation; expressing feelings, thoughts and knowledge; listening; asking questions; making inferences; and expressing and responding to arguments.

Swedish, school years 7–9:
Fiction for adolescents and adults from different times, from Sweden, the Nordic region and other parts of the world. Epic poetry, lyrical poetry and drama. Texts that highlight the human condition and issues of identity and life.

In **English**, the connection to this issue is more or less the same as for the Swedish subjects. When teaching literature, discussions about love, gender equality, relationships and sexuality may be central themes, and may then be taken up in connection with topical issues in the media.

English, school years 7–9
Opinions, feelings, experiences and future plans as well as relationships and ethical issues.

Living conditions, traditions, social relations and cultural phenomena in different contexts and areas in which English is used, also in comparison with personal experience and knowledge.

Conversations, discussions and writing in which pupils explain, describe, instruct and defend their opinions.

The syllabus for **Technology** states that teaching shall aim to ensure that pupils develop interest in and knowledge of the technology all around us. Pupils shall be given opportunities to develop an understanding of the significance and impact that technology has on people, society and the environment.

Technology, school years 7–9
How perceptions of technology influence individuals' use of technological solutions and career choices.

Subject-integrated sexuality education is nothing new

Subject-integrated, teacher-led sexuality education is not really anything new to Swedish schools. These ideas were already central when sexuality education became compulsory in 1955 and were written into the guidebook for teachers distributed in 1956. This document includes the following statement on subject-integration and the cross-disciplinary approach:

“In school, sexuality education should be addressed throughout, particularly in the subjects of home economics, science studies and civics in the earlier years, and in biology and health, Christianity studies and history with civics in the later years. Sexuality education should also be provided within the subject of childcare. In reference to the subject-teacher system in secondary school, it may perhaps be argued that, in terms of sexuality education, some form of division would be appropriate with regards to the duties of the biology, Christianity and history teachers, so that those first mentioned devote their teaching exclusively to the medico-biological aspects, while Christianity teachers deal with the ethical (moral) aspects, and history teachers the socio-economic factors. However, such a strict division of tasks is neither possible nor appropriate. Every teacher with experience of sexuality education knows that the biological aspects must be accompanied by a discussion of the ethical opinions, and that it is impossible to leave out the socio-economic aspects from the biological presentation of this material.”

Who should be responsible for providing sexuality education has been another subject for debate over the years. Today, teachers have a central role in this work due to the cross-disciplinary perspective to subject integration. However, the fact that teachers were well-qualified for this work was already being highlighted in 1956:

“In order for sexuality education to be an innate aspect of teaching in schools, teachers should have this task assigned to them by the union. There are some who have argued that it would be preferable, whenever possible, for a doctor to provide sexuality education. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the teachers, by virtue of having particular educational qualification and being accustomed to communicating with young people, are generally those best suited to provide this teaching. It will then be fused organically with those subjects, within the framework of which it should be communicated.”

From: Handledning i sexualundervisning [Sexuality Education Handbook], 1956

5. Improved quality – some basic premises

International research shows that the most effective sexuality education is curriculum-based, led by teachers from different disciplines, based on the pupils' needs, and holistic in its approach to the subject. Teaching should take place under safe conditions; be adapted to age, interests, and experience; contain varied working methods; and process the perceptions and norms that affect our attitudes and sexual behaviour. Staff must be well-trained, and the school's management must support their work.

The headteacher's governance and systematic quality management

To improve the quality of sexuality education, the headteacher needs to monitor and evaluate the teaching on a regular basis. The headteacher needs to ensure that staff and pupils alike are involved in the planning, evaluation and development of this teaching. This may involve the methods and approaches used, how to document work or what further professional training is required. What this ultimately boils down to is that all pupils have the right to high-quality, equivalent sexuality education regardless of their sexual orientation or identity, an effort that requires supervision and governance.

Scientific knowledge and proven experience

The perception that the teaching profession must be characterised by critical reflection was reinforced in the Education Act of 2010, which states that educational programmes must be based on scientific knowledge and proven experience.

Perceptions of sexuality are shaped by the laws and norms of society. If the teacher's own views on sexuality are contrary to the prevailing legislation, the teacher must adjust and act professionally. Teaching shall be based on legislation and safeguard pupils' rights and identity development.

Dialogue and opportunities for reflection

Using dialogue as an approach in the work with pupils in the various subjects may pave the way for reflection, which is an important and central aspect of pupils' learning and motivation. When pupils are asked what they would like to see more of in the sexuality education they receive, the answer is often discussion and conversations about relationships. There is a great need to discuss various questions about sexuality in a group setting led by a skilled teacher. The teacher is

there to act as an adult support, moderator and sounding board, and the pupils can broaden their horizons by listening to the reflections of others.

Pupils' participation / questions

During the teenage years, questions concerning sexuality, gender equality and relationships are often central to the pupils. Children and young people's perspectives may contain completely different questions and thoughts than the perspectives of adults. All those who work in schools need to be receptive to the thoughts of the pupils and provide them with opportunities to learn more about these matters and, above all, to discuss them in a more structured way.

Balance between healthy and risky perspectives

Teaching focused on health has often used problems as a foundation, but for sexuality education it is important to highlight the positive aspects. It is often easier to talk about what we want to prevent, e.g., sexual violence, degradation, honour-based abuse and oppression, teenage abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, etc., than to talk about what we want to promote and encourage, i.e., equal relationships, friendship/camaraderie, better mental and physical sexual health, self-esteem and strengthened identities, a positive school atmosphere, empowerment, etc. Positive aspects of sexuality such as intimacy or pleasure need to be addressed in education in order to create balance in this field.

Progression

It is important to adapt the teaching to the target group. One way of doing this is to base it on the questions and thoughts of the pupils. There are certain themes within subject-integrated teaching that recur at various stages, with this progression being clearly stated within different subjects. Some things need to be discussed continuously, and with new experiences, new perspectives and a deeper understanding, the knowledge can be consolidated and deepened as pupils progress through school.

Norm-conscious approach

Everyone working in the school shall apply a norm-conscious approach in their daily work. The approach is based on knowledge of norms, structures and how power is distributed, as well as how this can affect pupils' equal rights and opportunities, equitable treatment, and an equitable educational experience. A norm-conscious approach can, among other things, increase the possibilities for all pupils to be included in the teaching and help them to acquire the knowledge about sexuality, health and rights to which they are entitled.

Girls and boys – avoiding reinforcing differences

Schools are required to actively and consciously promote the equal rights and equal opportunities of girls and boys, women and men. The school's gender equality work should be combined with a norm-conscious approach to avoid stereotypical conceptions. Generalisations can also be part of the gender patterns that limit pupils. If pupils are categorised as a group instead of being seen as individuals, it could lead to gender norms not being visible and potentially cemented instead of challenged.

6. Cross-disciplinary projects

Working with a cross-disciplinary approach may interlink different aspects of the field of sexuality, consent and relationships, and thereby more easily create a full picture for the pupils. The following presents a few examples of this approach.

Sexuality and relationships through the ages

In what way has the view of gender, sexuality, relationships and love changed over the years? Within this theme, the pupils get an opportunity to look back at the historical changes that have created the contemporary view of sexuality and thus also gain a perspective on these matters in order to look forward.

History – addresses changes in the norms surrounding gender and sexuality in different historical periods. What kind of legislation has existed when it comes to men, women, various sexual orientations and transgender people? What significance has the family had in different times? Contraceptives, abortions, family formation, sex before marriage, sexual acts and sexual rights.

Democratisation in Sweden. The formation of political parties, new social movements, such as the women's movement, and the struggle for universal suffrage for women and men. Continuity and change in views on gender, equality and sexuality. Core content, school years 7–9, compulsory school

Religion – addresses how different religions have influenced peoples' views of sexuality and relationships in different historical periods. What has changed, and what remains to this day?

Conflicts and consensus between different religious and secular approaches, for example on issues of freedom of religion, sexuality and the perception of the roles of women and men. Core content, school years 7–9, compulsory school

Biology – can address changes in the view of contraception, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, primarily in recent decades. Which methods have historically been used to avoid unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and when were these methods introduced in Sweden? Condoms, contraceptive pills, IUDs and other forms of contraception have been around for many years, but how long have they been available in Sweden? Knowledge about the abortion legislation and the morning-after pill can be interwoven here.

Human reproduction, sexuality and identity, and issues related to relationships, love, responsibility, consent and reciprocity. Sexually transmitted diseases and contraception. Core content, school years 7–9, compulsory school

Other examples

Boundaries and integrity

Body integrity, self-esteem and feelings of consent and refusal are valuable topics for teaching about sexuality, consent and relationships. Recognising your body's cues for consent and boundaries, being able to express these feelings and having confidence that you are valuable and have the right to be listened to are fundamental abilities for safeguarding one's integrity. The education also includes discussions about reciprocity, free will, and consent, as well as how to understand someone else's feelings, show respect, and take responsibility for not hurting or harming someone close to you.

Biology, social studies, religion, mother tongue and Sami language, English

Human rights – body, health and family

In this interdisciplinary theme, pupils can deepen their knowledge of human rights. What are human rights and how are they fulfilled in Sweden and other countries? The theme can explore the links between human rights and religious beliefs and provide opportunities for pupils to work on their language skills. A historical perspective may also be relevant.

History, religion, biology, Swedish, Swedish as a second language

Love

Love and relationships is an area that lends itself well to an interdisciplinary project in schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities. Pupils can explore views of love throughout history and look at how love has been expressed in artwork, music and stories. Pupils can also explore the norms that limit love. The topic of love is vast, and teaching can highlight being in love with a friend or an idol,

long-distance love and love for one or more people at the same time. Through discussion, pupils can explore themes such as longing, how to meet a partner, unrequited love, jealousy or questions about being left or leaving someone. Through group discussions or discussing a scene from a film, for example, pupils can arrive at answers and concrete tips.

Interdisciplinary project, Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities

Hidden messages in advertisement

What gender patterns and norms are reproduced through advertisement and the mass media? In this theme, pupils get the chance to study the messages advertising sends about appearance, body, assumed characteristics, interests, sexuality and prosperity.

Art, civics and music.

"We are planning a larger advertisement theme together with Home and Consumer Studies and Art. In Home and Consumer Studies, the pupils will work with advertising and the way the media influences what we buy, and they will also look at consumer rights and obligations. In Art, the pupils will analyse images from mass media and imagery in general based on representations of gender and sexuality, for example. Simply put, we will work with the whole chain – from the function and structure of the media, to image analysis and consumer impact. The pupils normally like working with images from advertising. They easily see through exaggerated ideals of beauty and stereotypical gender-based portrayals of interests. They often become very critical of the advertising imagery after themes such as this. We scrape the surface with a norm-critical view, and it's effective." Teacher, Civics

7. Multiple actors involved in the work with sexuality education

Through their headteachers, schools have the overall responsibility of ensuring that all pupils receive a subject-integrated sexuality education. The National Agency for Education governs this work through the wording of the curricula; however, schools themselves decide how teaching is structured and organised. The National Agency for Education provides support in the form of continued professional development and materials, and by highlighting good examples. The National Agency for Education does not produce practical guides or learning materials in this subject.

Responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating the teaching lies with the teacher. To complement the teaching and the overall work on sexuality, consent and relationships, the school has the option of collaborating with external actors. For example, the school can work with youth clinics, organisations and authorities that can contribute with further training, materials, school visits, and experience and knowledge in the area. In the selection process, the question of what, how and why the activity or material should be included in the teaching needs to be asked based on the purpose of the teaching.

Authorities such as the Public Health Agency of Sweden and the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society have played an important role by both producing a knowledge base and allocating funding to other actors.

Several county councils work actively with prevention in terms of sexual health, and have initiatives targeted at the schools. The National Agency for Education recognises that the collaboration between authorities and organisations is important in order to develop the sexuality education provided in Swedish schools.

There is a long history of sexuality education in Sweden. Compulsory sexuality education was introduced in Swedish schools in 1955.

Since 2011, terms such as sexuality, relationships, gender, gender equality and norms have been included in several of the course and subject syllabuses for compulsory and upper secondary school and adult education. This means that the responsibility for including sexuality education falls on several teachers and that it will be incorporated into multiple courses and subjects.

In 2022, the Swedish curricula was amended to include new texts regarding gender equality and comprehensive sexuality education. The area was renamed to sexuality, consent and relationships.

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